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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000685

2002 DILI REPORT 8

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: EAST TIMOR: XANANA GUSMAO -- FINALLY -- DECLARES
CANDIDACY FOR PRESIDENT

¶1. SUMMARY. NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE HERO XANANA GUSMAO DECLARED HIS INTENT TO BECOME THE FIRST-EVER ELECTED PRESIDENT OF EAST TIMOR. WITH LESS THAN 90 MINUTES TO GO BEFORE THE FILING DEADLINE EXPIRED, GUSMAO ACCEPTED THE NOMINATION OF MINOR OPPOSITION PARTIES TO THE CHAGRIN OF THE MAJORITY PARTY FRETILIN. FRETILIN WANTED GUSMAO TO RUN AS AN CANDIDATE INDEPENDENTLY NOMINATED BY 5,000 CITIZENS. XANANA NOW PITS HIS POPULARITY AGAINST THE FRETILIN'S INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTH AND DEEPENS THE PERSONAL WITH FRETILIN. HOWEVER, HE DID OFFER AN OLIVE BRANCH OF SORTS BY UNDERLINING THAT HE WOULD CONTINUE HIS STATUS INDEPENDENT OF PARTY AFFILIATION AND NOT CAMPAIGN OR ENDORSE POLITICIANS FROM AMONG THE PARTIES WHO NOMINATED HIM. XANANA SHOULD CRUISE TO EASY VICTORY AGAINST THE ONLY OTHER CANDIDATE IN THE RACE -- THE VENERABLE XAVIER DO AMARAL, CURRENTLY THE DEPUTY OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND FORMERLY THE FIRST PRESIDENT OF EAST TIMOR IN 1975. END SUMMARY.

XANANA OFFICIALLY ENTERS RACE

¶2. NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE HERO "XANANA" GUSMAO OFFICIALLY DECLARED HIMSELF A CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT ON FEBRUARY 23. ONLY MINUTES BEFORE THE FILING DEADLINE WAS TO EXPIRE, XANANA LET TEN MINORITY POLITICAL PARTIES FORMALLY REGISTER HIS CANDIDACY. THESE PARTIES INCLUDE THE PSD AND PD, THE MOST PROMINENT OPPOSITION. THE TEN SUPPORTING PARTIES SPAN THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM FROM THE CONSERVATIVE UDT THROUGH THE SOCIALIST PARTY.

¶3. NOTABLY ABSENT WAS FRETILIN, THE MAJORITY PARTY. FRETILIN HAD WANTED GUSMAO TO ESCHEW ALL PARTY NOMINATIONS AND RUN BY ACCEPTING A NON-PARTISAN PETITION OF 5,000 CITIZEN SIGNATURES. XANANA'S SUPPORTERS HAD ACTUALLY COMPLETED SUCH A PETITION IN TIME FOR GUSMAO'S USE, BUT HE OPTED DIFFERENTLY. (ONLY ONE OTHER CANDIDATE IS REGISTERED, THE ASDT PARTY'S XAVIER DO AMARAL, THE DEPUTY SPEAKER OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY -- AND NO THREAT TO GUSMAO'S CHANCES.)

¶4. GUSMAO HAS STEADFASTLY REFUSED THE INDIVIDUAL PETITION ROUTE BECAUSE, HE ASSERTS, THAT WOULD MEAN HE WAS HARBORING A PERSONAL ASPIRATION TO BE PRESIDENT. ALL ALONG, HE HAS CLAIMED NO PERSONAL AMBITION. THUS HE WOULD ONLY ACCEPT THE IMPORTUNING OF OTHERS TO FILL THE OFFICE OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE. AT A MORE STRATEGIC LEVEL, XANANA WANTS TO RUN AND WIN WITHOUT FRETILIN'S SUPPORT TO DEMONSTRATE HE IS THE ONE WHO ENJOYS THE PEOPLE'S MANDATE. WITH SUCH A MANDATE, GUSMAO WOULD INCREASE HIS LEVERAGE IN THE POLICY MAKING PROCESS, EVEN THOUGH THE PRESIDENT WILL HAVE FEW ENUMERATED POWERS UNDER THE NEW CONSTITUTION.

XANANA: "NOT AN OPPOSITION CANDIDATE"

¶5. XANANA DID EXTEND AN OLIVE BRANCH, OF SORTS, TO FRETILIN. HE SAID THAT, IN SPITE OF THE MINOR PARTY NOMINATIONS, HE WOULD MAINTAIN A TOTALLY "INDEPENDENT" POLITICAL POSTURE. HE WOULD NOT BECOME THE "OPPOSITION'S PRESIDENT", NOR JOIN THOSE PARTIES. XANANA HAS CREATED AN UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION TO RAISE FUNDS AND MANAGE HIS CAMPAIGN. SUPPORTERS WILL HAVE TO FORSWEAR FORMAL POLITICAL AFFILIATION -- AT LEAST TEMPORARILY -- WHILE WORKING FOR HIM.

¶6. FRETILIN DOES NOT WANT TO ACTIVELY COUNTER XANANA. THEY WANTED TO ENDORSE HIM UNDER THE PETITION SCHEME. FRETILIN IS NOT MONOLITHIC. THERE IS A LARGE PRO-XANANA FACTION WITHIN THE PARTY WHO LIKE HIM AND BELIEVE HE IS THE RIGHT CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT. ACCORDING TO A MID-LEVEL FRETILIN OFFICIAL, FRETILIN WILL SOLVE ITS DILEMMA BY NOT OPPOSING XANANA AND OFFICIALLY REMAINING "NEUTRAL." THIS WOULD FREE PARTY MEMBERS TO GO OUT AND "VOTE THEIR CONSCIENCE."

RAMOS HORTA CANNOT BROKER DEAL

¶7. FOREIGN MINISTER JOSE RAMOS HORTA, THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER, HAD BEEN WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES TO RESOLVE MONTHS OF XANANA'S INDECISION. RAMOS HORTA HAD WORKED TO ARRANGE THE 5,000 SIGNATURES TO DENY XANANA THE EXCUSE THAT TIME HAD RUN OUT FOR THAT CANDIDATE OPTION.

¶8. FORTY-EIGHT HOURS BEFORE THE REGISTRATION EXPIRY, RAMOS HORTA ADVISED SENIOR UNTAET (UNITED NATIONS TRANSITIONAL ADMINISTRATION FOR EAST TIMOR) OFFICIALS THAT XANANA HAD FINALLY AGREED TO GO THE PETITION ROUTE, ONLY HOURS AFTER XANANA HAD INFORMED THE U.S. AMBASSADOR HE WAS LEANING TOWARD ACCEPTING THE MINOR PARTY NOMINATIONS -- IF HE DECIDED TO RUN.

¶9. RAMOS HORTA HAD EVEN WORKED OUT A PLAN IF XANANA DID THE UNTHINKABLE AND DECIDED NOT TO RUN. RAMOS HORTA, HIGHLY RESPECTED DOMESTICALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY, WOULD HAVE ACCEPTED A FRETILIN NOMINATION AND RUN AS NATIONAL UNITY CANDIDATE. ALTHOUGH HE WAS HAPPY ABOUT XANANA'S FINAL DECISION TO STAND AS A CANDIDATE, XANANA'S LATE REVERSAL CONFOUNDED EVEN HORTA.

XANANA AND FRETILIN: A WIDENING GULF?

¶10. XANANA GUSMAO'S REFUSAL TO GO THE PETITION ROUTE WILL INCREASE FRICTION BETWEEN HIM AND THE FRETILIN PARTY. THERE IS A CURRENTLY A SHARP PERSONAL RIFT BETWEEN GUSMAO AND FRETILIN'S MOST DOMINANT FIGURE, MARI ALKATIRI, WHO IS CHIEF MINISTER OF EAST TIMOR'S SECOND TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT AND WILL ASCEND TO THE POWERFUL OFFICE OF PRIME MINISTER AFTER INDEPENDENCE.

¶11. SENIOR OFFICIALS WITHIN UNTAET, WHICH GOVERNS EAST TIMOR UNTIL MAY 20, WOULD HAVE PREFERRED XANANA'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE PETITION ROUTE TO AVOID A WIDENING OF THE XANANA/FRETILIN BREACH. FRETILIN WILL DOMINATE THE NEW PARLIAMENT AND CABINET. THE PRESIDENT WILL HAVE FEW ENUMERATED POWERS AND WILL HAVE TO WORK CLOSELY WITH FRETILIN FOR GOVERNMENT TO OPERATE HARMONIOUSLY. OFFICIALS WITHIN GOVERNMENT AND FRETILIN REPORT THAT ALKATIRI HAS SOUGHT TO MEET WITH GUSMAO IN RECENT WEEKS ONLY TO BE REBUFFED.

¶12. COMMENT: GUSMAO KNOWS HE IS MORE POPULAR THAN FRETILIN OR ALKATIRI PERSONALLY. THIS MAY HAVE LED HIM TO IGNORE FRETILIN -- RATHER THAN NEGOTIATE WITH THEM -- ABOUT THE TERMS OF HIS CANDIDACY. ALTHOUGH THIS WILL WORK FOR HIM DURING THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, IT IS THE WRONG PRESCRIPTION FOR ENACTING LEGISLATION OR IMPLEMENTING NATIONAL POLICIES POST-MAY 20. XANANA'S WAVERING ABOUT HIS CANDIDACY HAS BEEN WORTHY OF A PERFORMANCE OF SHAKESPEARE'S "HAMLET," BUT THE UNCERTAINTY INVITES QUESTIONS ABOUT HIS

ROLE AS A DECISIVE OFFICE-HOLDER AFTER AN ELECTION HE IS
SURE TO WIN.

BOYCE